New weather satellite launched

18 September 2012 - Metop-B, the second of the EUMETSAT Polar orbiting satellites, which provide data for use by meteorologists and climate scientists at the Met Office and around the world, has been launched.

Metop-B was launched by a Soyuz rocket from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, yesterday and once in orbit will collect critical data for weather forecasters, such as the Met Office.

Along with its partner satellite Metop-A, it will orbit the earth from pole to pole at an altitude of around 800 km, taking measurements including temperature, humidity and cloud properties, as well as snow and ice cover, sea surface temperature and land vegetation.

EUMETSAT will take over control of the Metop-B satellite from the ESA European Space Operations Centre (ESOC) on 20 September 2012, and will spend around six months checking the performance of the satellite in orbit and validating all data taken from its observations. Once this is completed the Metop-B satellite will be declared operational.

All of this data is fed into the Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) models that produce our weather forecasts up to 10 days ahead. NWP is the basis of all modern global and regional weather forecasting, providing forecast advice, severe weather warnings and other support to public and private decision making.

David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science said: "I welcome the launch of Metop B which will enable the Met Office to stay at the forefront of weather forecasting and climate monitoring. I am also very pleased that a crucial piece of onboard instrumentation, the microwave humidity sounder, was built and designed in the UK, demonstrating our leading role in this area of technology."

Information from the Metop satellites has become indispensable to weather forecasters. A recent study by the Met Office demonstrated that Metop-A observations contribute close to 25% of the performance of numerical weather prediction (NWP) forecasts.

The data gathered by Metop have revolutionised the way the Earth's weather, climate and environment are monitored, both in the short term and in monitoring climate over decade-long data series of temperature, humidity, cloud cover and atmospheric gases such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrogen dioxide.

Alain Ratier, EUMETSAT's Director-General, said: "Metop data significantly improve weather forecasts up to 10 days ahead. Through these forecasts, they help protect life and property, and also benefit the weather-sensitive sectors of our economy, especially energy, transportation, construction, agriculture and tourism".

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